SMS

Park: Citizen has asked to trade for land

Continued from page 1A

honor with dignity a friend, Sen. Willie Chavez. A snack bar with sandwiches and refreshments would be added to the complex. This would fill a great need for our community."

The letter also said that since the property would become privately owned "the complex would go on the tax rolls whereby Valencia County would gain revenue."

Regarding Baca's proposal to buy the conservancy land located east of the park between the irrigation ditch and the river, Richard Jaramillo, Belen division manager for the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, said his organization has no plans to sell the land.

"While there is an agreement with the Belen school district, Willie Chavez Park is still state property," said Belen City Councilor Teresa Ulivarri, who is also staff development coordinator for State Parks and Recreation. "Public property can not be sold to a private citizen."

Currently, the school district uses the park as an outdoor classroom for fourth-graders to learn about the environment. The program is organized by teacher Molly Madden.

The Belen school district received $40,000 from the state in 1998 for a two-year budget to run the park. The district has not received additional special state appropriations to continue to maintain the park.

The City of Belen would like to take the facility into its park system. "We have offered to maintain the park and still make it available to the school district for their educational center," said City Manager Sally Garley.

"We would like to add shower stalls and open up the recreational vehicle facility now at the park," Belen Mayor Ronnie Torres said. "There are currently RV hookups, but the restrooms are on a septic system. With city water and sewer now on River Road, it would be easy to hook the park up to the city's system.

"Having a functioning park would help us attract snowbirds to boost our tourism," he said of winter travelers who leave the colder areas for warmer parts of the country. "This is a park that is not being used to its potential."

"We're just waiting for the Belen School District to decide what they want to do with the park," Torres said.

The board meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 11, in the administration building's board room.

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 Oct 13, 2001

OURVIEW

Park it here, Belen!

The issue

Team ownership of Willie Chavez Park would be in the best interest of the people.

We invite readers to share their ideas and opinions with us. Write to Letters, News-Bulletin, P.O. Box 25, Belen, NM 87002 or post your views on the News-Bulletin web page at news-bulletin.com

The City of Belen is the appropriate agency to run Willie Chavez Park — in cooperation with the schools. The Belen Board of Education acted correctly in not handing it over to a private citizen, no matter how admirable his motives were.

The city knows more about operating parks than the school system does — and it can bring that once-thriving park back to life. The schools can develop educational uses for the park and open it to other districts. When the state ran the riverside park, it was alive with people. Snowbirds from the northern part of the country parked their RVs there for months. Not only did they add to our local economy, but they provided eyes to see that nothing untoward happened in the park.

Boy Scouts had set out paths along the riverside and students were visiting to see wildlife and the vegetation that thrived there.

We hope that a team made up of city and schools will bring more visitors and events to the park and add to the little museum that was built up in the house on the property.

At one time, Belen used its riverside park for church picnics, ice cream socials and even, at one time, swimming parties. While we don't believe the water in the Rio Grande is safe any more for swimming, we do believe more people should go down into the cool greenery of that area and use the park.

It could be such a well-used recreation spot with some horseshoe facilities, barbecue pits and other amenities. We'd like to see some major action take place to make this park an integral part of the community's life.

AUTHOR!
's new novel
whole new world
PAGE 2

INTERNATIONAL
Songs from around globe
come to Los Lunas High
LOCAL PAGE 9A

GETTING THEIR KICKS
Tiger soccer teams
split with Alamogordo
SPORTS PAGE B1

VALENCIA COUNTY
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Belen wants to run Willie Chavez Park

By Jane Moorman
News-Bulletin Staff Writer

Belen

The future of Sen. Willie Chavez State Park on River Road in Belen will be discussed Thursday at the Belen School Board meeting.

The school district's agreement with the State Parks Department has expired, and the City of Belen would like to obtain ownership of the park.

"We have some options for the park," Superintendent Don Duran said. "We can continue to own it, give it to another public entity or give it back to the state."

During discussion on the park at its Sept. 25 meeting, the board asked Duran to obtain legal advice regarding trading the land with a private citizen.

Anthony Baca has proposed taking over the park and running a private RV park. His father, Tony, presented the proposal to the school board.

"We would like to obtain the park and the Conservancy's land next to it for a RV park," Tony Baca said.

The letter presented to the board by Baca included a proposal with three parts. First was that the "school district take ownership of the park."

Then "the park (would) be leased to Baca for a caretakers' fee with an option to trade raw bosque land. By so doing, this will eliminate all liabilities to the school district," according to the letter.

And finally, Baca would "provide the school district a letter guaranteeing use of the park for outdoor classroom activities, whereby classes could be brought to the park for nature studies."

Anthony Baca said in his letter: "The Sen. Willie Chavez Park fits my business dream for a private park. I would keep the park intact including the name, to

■ *See* **Park,** *Page 12A*

Mom longs to find out who killed her son

By Clara Garcia
News-Bulletin Staff Writer

Belen

When Belinda Giron received a phone call last year and heard that her 19-year-old son had been shot, all she could do was pray that he was still alive. She arrived at her son's house on the morning of Sept. 3, 2000, and her worst fears were confirmed.

Felipe Giron was murdered while he lay in bed at his home. Two men, wearing dark clothing and masks, reportedly broke into his home, went to his bedroom and shot him in the head with a high-powered rifle.

According to police reports, Giron's 16-year-old girlfriend was in the bed with him when he was shot. She was left unharmed as the two men ran out the back door.

"All I could think of was 'Why?'" Giron's mother said. "How was I going to explain this to my younger children?"

■ *See* **Shooting,** *Page 12A*

KINGS OF THE HILL

T.S. Last-News-Bulletin photo

With their handiwork *behind them in the distance, seniors at Los Lunas High School pose after returning from painting the rocks that spell out "02 LL" on Los Lunas Hill. The students took advantage of no school on Columbus Day Monday to paint the rocks — a senior tradition at LLHS. It's also tradition to paint each other. As you can see, the Class of 2002 was enthusiastic about the ritual.*

Belen School Board tables topic of Willie Chavez Park ownership

By Jane Moorman
News-Bulletin Staff Writer

Belen

A decision on what to do with Sen. Willie Chavez Park on River Road has been tabled until the Belen School Board learns if it can co-own the park with the City of Belen.

The fate of the park, which the district has run since 1997, has become an issue because New Mexico Parks and Recreation is wanting to settle the title. The agreement under which the state and school district have operated expired in September, 1999.

"Is it possible to have a joint ownership with the city?" Board President Julian Luna said. "A joint powers agreement or joint ownership would allow the city to do what they want to do with the property, but we would have 50 percent ownership and be assured of the educational use of it."

"I don't know if the state would allow a 50-50 agreement," said Belen Mayor Ronnie Torres, who was present at the meeting to answer any questions from the board. "If we split it down the middle, we split the costs down the middle."

The city had shown interest in obtaining the park if the school district wanted to relinquish ownership. When the park was first offered from the state, then-Mayor Richard Aragon said the city couldn't afford it.

Board Member Al Wisneski asked what it has cost to run the park. Duran indicated it cost $6,199 last year, and the school district had made $1,046 from people staying at the campground.

Another reason the city had not accepted the park from the state in 1997 was that it was outside of the city limits. Since then, the city has annexed River Road to the Rio Grande bridge, including the park. It has also increased its park and recreation department by developing the multi-purpose park near the high school.

"If we took ownership, we would improve the camping facility by adding showers," Torres said. "The use of the park is limited because there are no showers. Now that the city sewer system extends to the river bridge, the facilities can be upgraded."

The city has indicated if it owns the park, the school district would be allowed to continue using the park for its environment education program.

As the board debated what to do with the land, Board Member Paul Trujillo said he will not vote to give the park to the city unless it was in joint ownership.

"Why at this point, after property has increased in value, does the city want the land? I wonder what their interest is in the land. If we own the land we have a card in hand for grants to support our educational program," Trujillo said.

"You guys can keep it if you want to," Torres said in response to Trujillo's comment regarding the city's intent. "We thought it would be a good thing to take care of the expenses and let you use it for our classes."

"I think it would be a bad move to not have the land in hand for leveraging in the future," Luna said of the five acres of land. "I don't know what the land could be used for down the road, but maybe we should keep ownership for the future."

Because the land is deeded as a public park, it cannot be sold to a private entity. If the owner wants to use the land for something other than a public park, they must provide the same quantity of land somewhere else for a public park.

Zia Mark Proof 4-3516 1-2783 Sept 27, 2001

BELEN

City Aims To Acquire Chavez Park

School District Controls Area

"We would like to add shower stalls and open up the recreational vehicle facility now at the park that would help us attract snowbirds to boost our tourism."

MAYOR RONNIE TORRES

By Arley Sanchez
Journal Staff Writer

Snowbirds might be seen congregating along with sandhill cranes and other migratory creatures if the city is able to acquire Willie Chavez Park just south of the Belen bridge.

"We would like to add shower stalls and open up the recreational vehicle facility now at the park that would help us attract snowbirds to boost our tourism," said Mayor Ronnie Torres, referring to the people who each winter leave colder areas for warmer parts of the country.

The park would also offer city residents another recreational venue, he said.

At its Oct. 11 meeting, the Belen school district is scheduled to consider transferring the park to the city.

The district acquired the park in 1997 from the state Parks Division. It was among several parks the state was closing because it didn't attract enough visitors for fees to make it self-sustaining.

The park, named after the late Willie Chavez, who was a state senator and popular local, longtime radio broadcaster, was created out of five acres of the river bosque.

The school district obtained the park under a two-year transfer program that included a $40,000 budget from the state to maintain the park, but the program has expired, and the board must now consider whether it wants to continue paying the maintenance and operation costs, school board president Julian Luna said.

The district has been using the park as an outdoor classroom for students to study the environment and habitat of bosque wildlife, Luna said, adding that it has also been open to the public.

"It has been used by the schools for educational purposes, and we've encouraged as many children as possible to use the park," Luna said. "In making our decision, we will also look at how effective it's been as an educational center."

Torres noted that under any agreement reached with the district, school children will continue to be encouraged to use it as an educational or recreational resource.

"The kids can still use it, and it would provide another recreational area for the residents of the city," he said.

Luna said a private individual has also proposed buying the site and converting it into a recreational area. He said the district's attorneys are researching whether that's an option.

B.H.H.C 4-1-29

WILLIE CHAVEZ PARK
2001.